

critical digest

Vol II No. 14

January 23, 1950

The Weekly That Keeps You Informed of the Current Broadway Critical Scene

N.Y. Openings This Week

Design for a Stained Glass Window-Mansfield, 1/23/50. Jack Segasture presents Martha Scott in a new historical drama about a 16th century English martyr by William Berney and Howard Richardson. Boston critics thought the historical part of the proceedings succeeded, but that the play didn't have enough verve for an effective theatre piece.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Rodgers and Hammerstein production of Samuel Taylor's comedy based on the book by the same name by Robert Fontaine drew mixed notices in Boston, but word of mouth advertising turned the show into a solid hit. Cast includes Claude Dauphin, Richard Hart, Edgar Stehli and Johnny Stewart.

The Devil's Disciple-City Center, 1/25/50. Third production of N.Y. Theatre Company opens two week run. Show play features Maurice Evans, Marsha Hunt, Dennis King and Victor Jory. The Heiress has been named as the final presentation, replacing The Time of Your Life.

As You Like It-Cort, 1/26/50. Theatre Guild's revival of Shakespeare comedy starring Katherine Hepburn has completed long and successful road tour prior to New York opening.

Quick Glance at New N.Y. Shows -- digests on inside pages

Alive and Kicking-Winter Garden, 1/17/50. Only four reviewers found enough good material to praise in the revue. Rest felt there were too many writers trying to do too many things. All praised Jack Cole and his dancers.

The Enchanted-Lyceum, 1/18/50. Eight pro reviews were filed by the daily critics in favor of the Giraudoux-Valency comedy. Those who don't like fantasy in any shape or form, panned the play. Though the show did receive many good reviews, Atkinson, Times, and Barnes, Herald Tribune, both thought the script lacked unity. Music was lauded by all the critics.

The Man-Fulton, 1/19/50. Critics divided almost evenly on merits of Mel Dinelli's melodrama. Pros included critics of Herald Tribune, Mirror, Journal American, Brooklyn Eagle and Newark News. Those who say "nay" voted so because they felt the author didn't have enough material for a three act play.

Dance Me A Song-Royale, 1/20/50. Reviewers for the dailies also split on the assets of the new Wiman musical. Wally Cox was hailed by most as the new humorous find of the season, and several of the sketches were applauded. Con votes were recorded by the critics of Times, Herald Tribune, Mirror, World Telegram and Sun.

Shows That Closed

Diamond Lil-Plymouth, 2/5/49-1/21/50. The critics wrote "Pro and Con" reviews for the opening of Mae West's play. They praised La West to the heavens, but had other suggestions for her 20 year old play.

Lond An Ear-Mansfield, 12/16/48-1/21/50. All but three reviewers greeted the musical revue from the West Coast with cheers on opening night. Lardner, Star, Clurmen, New Republic, and Rubin, Daily Worker panned the show for very different reasons. The latter objected to one skit on racial grounds.

N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance -- see page 799 -- Cumulative Index Issued Monthly

Morehouse Casts for Imaginary One Night Stands

Drama dreaming about the perfect one night show culled from the available talent Ward Morehouse in his N.Y. World Telegram and Sun column picked the people and scenes he would include in such a production. Sure that such a bill could run one night stands across the country for years at \$100 a seat, his list included the final scene of I Know My Love, the going-to-Johannesburg number in Lost In The Stars, the first scenes of Caesar and Cleopatra, the show-stopping Channing songs of Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, and brief moments of the leads in The Velvet Glove and Clutterbuck.

Dance Me A Song

a. Times --Con-- Looks like a carnival but sounds hackneyed and mechanical. Pleasant to look at, handsome sets and costumes. Most of the sketches are undistinguished, most of the music dull, none of the performers ingenious enough to make a silken evening of mediocre material. Cox is best in two skits.--Atkinson.

b. Herald Tribune --Con-- Lively and colorful, but lean on entertainment. Inspiration is at a low point throughout. Eager performers in an exceedingly uneven revue. McCracken good in several stage forms, Cox delightful.--Barnes.

c. News --Pro-- Refreshing, happy air, beautifully set and costumed. Alive with attractive people of talent, dancers swift and gay and songs have a lilt. A good many of its sketches are really funny; whole show has air of good breeding and intelligence.--Chapman.

d. Mirror --Con-- Theatrical misdemeanor by Wiman, material, scenery, costumes, and dances all seem off the beam. Cox is hit of the evening, he was smart enough to bring his own material. Okay as a buy for nite club show with a dinner included at \$3 per person.--Coleman.

e. Compass --So-So-- Full of likable, young, talented people, produced with utmost taste. Everyone, actors and writers, enjoyed what he did, but no one brought the script together to make a revue. Result still is pleasant evening in theatre.--Pollock.

f. Post --Pro-- Cox is the humorous find of the year in modestly pleasant intimate revue. Several of the sketches are amusing, which is par for this season. Nothing painful or boring in the show.--Watts.

g. World Telegram and Sun --Con-- Such a show with no character is as hard to sit through as it is to describe. Does nothing to enhance the reputation of anyone connected with it in any way. Wally Cox and Goodman and Kirkwood each take over for solid effect, no real punch to any of the other material.--Hawkins.

h. Journal American --So-So-- Why not a "Consolidated New Musical Revue" combining the best of Touch and Go, Alive and Kicking and Dance Me A Song? No part of present show is really tasteless, though some of it is beyond me.--Garland.

i. Brooklyn Eagle --Pro-- At no point does show fracture you with humor or charm, but it is pretty consistent in maintaining an enjoyable level of fun. Two of the eight sketches are passably funny, and only one falls flat. Dancing is attractive without being distinguished.--Sheaffer.

j. Newark News --Pro-- Handsome decorations and nice dancing are its chief assets. Performed with commendable verve by pleasant company, it seemed a reasonably brisk entertainment. Surely in need of worthier material.--Field.

Hi Phillips Plays It Straight for Velvet Glove

Hi Phillips, now conducting his humor column in World Telegram and Sun, praised Grace George and Walter Hampden for their fine work in The Velvet Glove. Extra satisfying was his summation of the show.

Out of Town Drama Critics Circle Formed

Virginia Barry, drama critic for Asbury Park, N.J. Press, organized an Out-of-Town Drama Critics Circle to pick the year's best play. Papers represented at the first meeting included Allentown, Pa. Chronicle; Waterbury, Conn. Republic and Kansas City Star. John Chapman, reporting on the event, noted that there are more drama critics than dramas.

Alive and Kicking

a. Times --Con-- Mediocre revue in a mongrel style is never really exciting. Some items in it which are alive and kicking include David Burns' slapstick, Jack Gilford's satires, Lenore Lonergan's few moments of wonderful singing and Jack Cole dances. Could hardly be more unlikely setting for Cole's magnificent ballets than this stale and untalented revue.-Atkinson.

b. Herald Tribune --Con-- Overall lack of style and design in a dull pot-pourri and a boring and untidy revue. In between bright moments of comedy and dances production falls flat on its face. Surgery on road has left a great many scars in the material.-Barnes.

c. News --Con-- If the writers had as much talent as the cast, I'd have left the theatre in a better state of mind. But writers have generally fallen down on the job, leaving cast with not enough to do. Dances good, but one of best items in show is drummer in orchestra pit.-Chapman.

d. Mirror --Con-- Anemic musical revue, not sufficiently alive nor original nor clever to be kicking around for long. Amazing so many good cooks have not been able to concoct a tastier dish. Production is cheap and shoddy, cast doesn't have half a chance with the material given them.-Colman.

e. Compass --Pro-- More professional than some of the other recent revues, less inclined to count on cuteness and parlor tricks, more on grown-up side. Nothing really brilliant, but you can have a very good time. There are some revues about that look scholastic by comparison.-Pollock.

f. Post --Con-- Joy of playgoing not appreciably aided by new show. Lot of talents of various degrees and kinds seemed to have spoiled the broth. Final result is disappointingly mediocre entertainment.-Watt.

g. World Telegram and Sun --Pro-- Thoroughly delightful entertainment by an eager talented company. Cole emerges as entertainer of star proportions, Lonergan reveals varied and astute talents in musical field. When it does not grip you, it still does not bore you. Songs not show's best points.-Hawkins.

h. Journal American --Pro-- Taken as it comes show is ardent and inelegant revue in which the intentions are superior to their fulfillment, the numbers superior to their material and the dances are tops. But it is alive and it does some kicking.-Garland.

i. Brooklyn Eagle --Con-- Doesn't seem to have enough of what it takes. Bright spots outnumbered by sober and downright dull ones. Show is weakest in the humor department, despite hard working cast.-Sheaffer.

j. Newark News --Con-- Except for exciting visual antics of Cole's dances, show is lack-luster carnival handicapped by uncommonly dull sketch materials and tunes. Capably directed within its limits, orchestra work effective.-Field.

Sobel Irritated by Channing's Performance

Comparing the Carol Channing of Lord An Ear with the Channing of Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, Louis Sobel, Journal American, was very disappointed with the latter. He didn't like the artificiality of her performance.

Wolcott Gibbs entertaining skit on the doings at the Drama Critics Annual Award meeting has been dropped from the agenda of the NTA Album show. Strong opposition has been reported from several of the critics who think the sketch is much too personal.

The Enchanted

a. Times --Con-- Whimsical discussion of spirit world that lacks spirit, performance lacks buoyancy and sparkle. Music most successful part of the production, play worthy in kind of enchantment that makes ghosts, dreams and fortresses exhilarating in the theatre. --tkinson.

b. Herald Tribune --Con-- Endowed with delightful acting and superior staging, but lacks coherent and unified dramatic pattern. MacGrath brings most of the radiance to the offering in a superb portrayal. Pity that the action is too frequently meaningless. Music is a sheer delight. --Barnes.

c. News --So-So-- Came away from first performance in a mixed up state of great admiration and more than slight confusion. Many fine and witty lines, well spoken by principals. Should be simply wonderful play, splendidly acted, skillfully directed and highly civilized. It probably is, but I'm just too insensitive to know a good thing when I see it. --Chapman.

d. Mirror --Pro-- One of the most interesting and rewarding comedies to arrive in New York in many seasons, demands constant attention of the playgoer. We loved it, and we think Barrie would have loved it to. Salute producers for their courage in thinking that average playgoer have minds and hearts, and are capable of enjoying a fascinating and absorbing adventure. --Coleman.

e. Compass --Pro-- Beautiful comedy, sly, ironic, wryly witty and beneficent, acted with great nicety, one of the plays that can persuade the theatre to be proud of itself again. Maybe less fascinating than Madwoman, but there is a great deal that glisters and it is all gold. --Pollock.

f. Post --Pro-- Fresh and engaging fable more fortunate in its direction, acting and adaptation than Madwoman, though basically less arresting. Brilliant staging, fine sets and music, excellent acting. Show is welcome newcomer. --Watts.

g. World Telegram and Sun --Pro-- Gentle, entertaining fantasy. Kaufman does one of best staging jobs in years, MacGrath is delicate, fragrant, ethereal. Brilliant production and writing making intellectual play thoroughly absorbing. --Hawkins.

h. Journal American --Pro-- Fascinating tragicomedy of life, death and hereafter. Not sure you will like it, I like it very much. Entire cast could scarcely be bettered. Cheer MacGrath, she seems to know all the answers. --Garland.

i. Brooklyn Eagle --Pro-- Not as good as Madwoman, but spotty Giraudoux is better than none at all. Holds much that is rare and rewarding for all playgoers who treasure a unique, substantial talent, but it doesn't quite jell. Would seem better if it came before first show, but it is still welcome. --Sheaffer.

j. Newark News --Pro-- Though difficult to follow at times, play is stage work of fragile beauty and literary design. Staged with special understanding and skill. MacGrath scenes are extremely touching and real, cast good. --Field.

Walker Not Sure What Was Enchanted

Denton Walker, News, was slightly confused by first night performance of The Enchanted. What it is about is anybody's guess, he wrote. But Walker did like Jack Cole's dancing in Alibi. --Kicking.

Atkinson Leading in Variety's Poll of Critics

Brooks Atkinson, Times, leads the pack of N.Y. critics in Variety's semi-annual tally of figures to show which critic picked the most commercial hits. Record based on 24 shows gives Atkinson 1833 with 23 right, 3 wrong and one 'no opinion expressed'. These were taken from his original reviews in which he gave 6 favorable notices, 17 unfavorable notices and one 'no opinion'. Chapman, News, and Marchand, critic for the defunct Sun, came in second and third in the mid-season ratings. Hawkins, World Telegram and Sun, was at the bottom of the list.

The Man

--Pros--

a. Herald Tribune -- Arrent thriller loaded with suspense and fine acting. First rate fare for fanciers of horror shows. Direction is as tight as it should be. Superior thriller, graced with acute and authoritative acting.-Burns.

c. Mirror -- Not enough chills, thrills or novelty to qualify for a full evening's entertainment. Reminiscent of Kind Lady and Night Must Fall. Really is an overgrown one act play. Pacing too slow.-Coleman.

e. Journal American -- In spite of faults in script, your hair will stand on its end before the play is over. Fine acting, but play starts off too slowly, setting is perfect.-Garland.

g. Brooklyn Eagle -- Playgoers who like to be startled out of their wits can stop complaining. This play takes care of them. Small range thriller played expertly on two strings.-Sheaffer.

i. Newark News -- Generally acceptable thriller, several degrees higher in excitement than recent trices. Two leads seem always equal to the taut task at hand, others good.-Field

--Cons--

b. Times -- Like The Closing Door, this play is a dilattante creep show, lacks gusto for torture and maliceance. But if you want to be scared by a psychopath this may well be what you need.-Atkinson.

d. News -- Being by nature and occupation a ghoul and a criminal, I had a happy time watching Gish in the worst jam she has been in since Birth of a Nation. First effectual stage thriller in quite some time.-Chapman.

f. Compass -- One actor masquerading as a full length show, cast does as well as can be expected. Thrilling moments are too few and far between to keep up interest.-Pollock.

h. Post -- Acting, direction, setting fine, but play remains more painful than thrilling. Much like other moles, though attention doesn't wander. Ending is more depressing than exciting.-Watts.

j. World Telegram and Sun -- Despite expert performances, and some fertile direction, it simply is not as absorbing as you wish. Might have long life as TV play. Fine acting by Gish and Hammer, but result is lack of variety and a thinness of dramatic texture.-Hawkins.

Hart Would Put Damp on Pre-Broadway Publicity

Less publicity for a production before it arrived on Broadway, would suit the producers and authors better, Moss Hart told the recent meeting of Drama Desk. He also thought the printing of out-of-town reviews might influence the opinion of the N.Y. critics.

Sheaffer Condemns Opening Night Interact Applause

Applause at opening night performance of The Member of the Wedding after entrance of cast members in each scene irritated Louis Sheaffer, Brooklyn Eagle. He fears this will turn the professional first nighters into a clique.

Sheaffer Suggests Delayed Review System for Certain Plays

Certain plays should not be reviewed by the critics until they have run a week or so, suggests Louis Sheaffer, Brooklyn Eagle. Though he realizes this is a very impractical idea, he does think it is important. Sheaffer revisited The Father before it closed and found a much better play than the first nighters witnessed.

The Member of the Wedding

a. Christian Science Monitor Pro Play of character played for its human values not rushed nervously, or tricked out with business. Clurman's approach to admirable adaptation of McCuller novel makes play something memorable in the theatre. Acting of the highest order from Harris and Waters. Beauport.

b. Wall Street Journal Pro Delicate and amusing, beautifully written and acted. Even if illusion wasn't quite complete for me, there are many delights in play which must be recommended. Couldn't always believe in the Harris role. Cooke.

c. Journal of Commerce Pro Sincere off shot of successful book proves worthwhile theatrical offering. The first far-reaching theme of the season, it is entertainment plus. Harris is star of moment, handles role with touching clarity and amazing comprehension. Colby.

The Corn is Green

d. Variety Pro Engrossing, enjoyable show. Williams drama remains plausible, comes across as convincing and moving show. Le Gallienne's brisk playing adds inspired touch, but not as firm as Barrymore portrayal. Performance overcomes faulty acoustics of the large house. Hobbs.

e. Billboard Pro It hasn't Barrymore, but it is still a fine play. Becomes more Waring's play, he has lost none of his original conception. Hinkley is adequate but not up to Schneer's job as the original horrible little stinker. Le Gallienne plays clearly and competently, though hurried. Francis.

f. George Jean Nathan Con Play is of no consequence, it doesn't belong in lofty plans of City Center. Le Gallienne is scarcely an actress calculated to promote City Center's purpose, plenty of better actresses for the role on Equity's "at liberty" list. Why didn't they do Green Bay Tree or Dangerous Corners if they wanted a serious English play with just one set?

g. Cue So-So Sometimes it is a very moving little play. Le Gallienne plays cleanly, forcefully with mechanical fury which seems superfluous. Waring is fine. Wish they would plan some Barrie and Howard plays for the next season. Gabriel.

She Steers to Conquer

h. Commonwealth Pro Slightly performance of classic that is often charming and often boring. Great amount of hullabaloo by Stone. Except for mixed accents of cast, they performed nicely as an ensemble. Staging uneven. Melan.

Wider Definition of "Play" Urged by Pollock

A play is anything that is interesting in a playhouse, Arthur Pollock, Compass, defined. Playgoers should enjoy themselves in the theatre; there is no need for them to worry if the show on stage is formal drama or not, he said.

Rodgers Ignores Critics on First Nights

Richard Rodgers keeps far away from the critics on opening nights, he told Ward Morehouse, World Telegram and Sun, in an interview in Boston. Rodgers is in favor of

TV Serial About Drama Critic

That Wonderful Guy is the title of a new ABC TV program seen Wednesday evenings. The title character in this weekly comedy series, played by Neil Hamilton, is a famous drama critic. The critic lives in a penthouse, wears fancy smoking jackets and is very bossy to his assistants. His reviews are dictated to a secretary. The author of the show says the character is purely fictional.

Alive and Kicking

a. Morning Telegraph --Pro-- Nothing in it to annoy any one, and much to please everyone. Cole and company work flawlessly and entrancingly. Not enough of Burns and Lonergan. Praise must go to drummer for dances.-Bolton.

b. Women's Wear Daily --Con-- Proves old adage of too many cooks spoiling the broth, skits not especially witty. Show lacks exuberance that is the usual commitment of youth. Dances good, but as musical show synthesis it just does not jell.-Dash.

c. Wall Street Journal --So-So-- Some of show good enough entertainment to obliterate the memory of the feeble efforts and to make it worthwhile to recommend. Cole's excellent dance company top items. Wonder how such good stuff and such poor material ever got mixed, probably due to decentralization.-Cooke.

The Enchanted

d. Morning Telegraph --Con-- Giraudoux and Valency deserve a big fat "M" for Madwoman, and a reluctant "D" for this play. Spirit of play is wan and it has an advance case of the giddiness. Leading woman is not best actress at hand, doesn't have enough talent to carry the part, rest of cast is good.-Bolton.

e. Women's Wear Daily --Pro-- This review is a paen of praise for all concerned, but we are realistic enough to qualify the admonition that the theatre goer must be attuned to this style of fantasy. Play charged with supernatural undertones, magnificent job of directing, acting is superlative.-Dash.

f. Wall Street Journal --So-So-- Fantasy did not come off, too much talk, not enough invention, though I was pleasantly bemused about it. Setting didn't conjure up spirits, MacGrath fortunate choice for lead, Addy excellent.-Cooke.

The Man

g. Women's Wear Daily --Con-- After torturingly slow buildup, it manages to extract a few suspenseful moments, but it fails to build any cumulatively overpowering tension. Repetitious and talky with customary cliches of plot.-Dash.

Key to N.Y.C. Criticism at a Glance

Reviewers are rated as to how they like the show, not if they think it will be a hit. "Pro" means the reviewer recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. "Con" means he doesn't recommend it as such. "So-So" means the reviewer did not state his preference directly.

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|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 11. Newark News | 21. Catholic World |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 12. Women's Wear Daily | 22. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 13. Daily Worker | 23. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 14. Wall Street Journal | 24. The New York Times |
| 5. NY Compass (Star, PM) | 15. Journal of Commerce | 25. Sat. Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post | 16. George Jean Nathan | 26. Newsweek |
| 7. NY Sun (Morehouse) | 17. Morning Telegraph | 27. Time |
| 8. NY Journal American | 18. Variety | 28. Nation |
| 9. NY World Telegram and Sun | 19. Billboard | 29. New Republic |
| 10. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Theatre Arts | 30. New Yorker |

Alive and Kicking - Winter Garden, 1/17/50. Pro: 5-8-9-17. Con: 1-2-3-4-6-10-11-12. So-So: 14.

Caesar and Cleopatra - National, 12/21/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-10-11-12-14-15-16-17-18-19-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30. Con: 5-8-13. So-So: 9.

Clutterbuck - Biltmore, 12/3/49. Pro: 3-5-6-7-8-12-15-17-19-23-27-30. Con: 1-9-11-13-16-18-22-24-26-28-29. So-So: 2-4-10-14.

Death of a Salesman - Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: Nation. So-So: Time

Detective Story - Hudson, 3/23/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-14-15-17-18-19-20-22-23-26-27-30.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes - Ziegfeld. 12/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-24-26-29-30. Con: 6-28. So-So: 16-19-22-23-27.

I Know My Love - Shubert, 11/1/49. Pro: 2-3-4-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-23-24-25-26-28. Con: 1-5-16-20-22-27-29-30.

Kiss Me Kate - Century, 12/31/48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: New Republic.

Lost in the Stars - Music Box, 10/30/49. Pro: 1-2-3-5-6-7-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-23-26. Con: 8-9-13-22-24-25-28-29-30. So-So: 4-27.

Miss Liberty - Imperial, 7/15/49. Pro: 4-7-8-12-17-19. Con: 1-2-18-20-22-23-25-27-29. So-So: 3-6-9-21-26.

Mister Roberts - Alvin, 2-13/48. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-18-19-20-22-23-25-26-27-29-30. Con: 24. So-So: 13-16-17.

South Pacific - Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-15-17-18-19-20-24-25-26-30. So-So: 23-27.

Texas Li'l Darlin' - Hollinger, 11/25/49. Pro: 3-6-9-12-13-14-15-16-17-22-24. Con: 1-4-7-8-18-19-23-29-30. So-So: 2-5-10-11-26-27.

That Lady - Beck, 11/22/49. Pro: 1-9-10-11-19. Con: 2-3-5-6-8-12-14-15-16-17-18-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30. So-So: 4-7.

The Enchanted - Lyceum, 1/18/50. Pro: 4-5-6-8-9-10-11-12. Con: 1-2-17. So-So: 3-14.

The Men - Fulton, 1/19/50. Pro: 2-4-8-10-11. Con: 1-3-5-6-9-12.

The Member of the Wedding - Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 1-3-4-5-6-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-17-18-19-23-24-26-28. So-So: 2-27-30.

The Rat Race - Barrymore, 12/22/49. Pro: 4-15. Con: 2-3-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-16-17-19-22-23-24-27-28-29-30. So-So: 1-18-26.

The Velvet Glove - Booth, 12/26/49. Pro: 3-4-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-17-19-22-24-26. Con: 2-5-16-18-23-27-30. So-So: 1-6-7-29.

Touch and Go - Broadhurst, 10/13/49. Pro: 1-3-6-9-11-12-13-15-16-17-23-24-26-27-28-30. Con: 2-4-5-7-14-18-19-20-22. So-So: 8-10-29.

Where's Charley - St. James, 10/11/48. Pro: 1-2-3-5-8-9-11-14-15-17-18-20-21-23-29-30. Con: 6-7-12-13-16-19-22-24-25-26. So-So: 4-27.

